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ABSTRACT

This practicum was designed to address the problem of low quantity and poor quality of writing in two lower level English classes (50 students). The objectives were to increase motivation for writing, thereby improving overall writing production by the students. A writing workshop was designed to improve the motivation of the students by empowering them to have a choice in what they write about and how they write it. Students were submerged and surrounded by writing for three class periods out of five in a school week. Individual conferences were used as a means of evaluation. Grading was done by charting each student's daily progress and having the students tell quickly where they were in their writing. The focus of the writing was on content, and student writing was kept in folders. Students chose their own topics and were allowed to work cooperatively. Motivation was increased and, as a result, students' writing improved in both quantity and quality. Students' attitudes toward writing also improved, and the number of disruptions per class periods decreased. Students became involved in the writing process and developed skills enabling them to both work independently and share ideas with peers. The data from this practicum clearly showed that when students become motivated their writing improves dramatically. Students will write more and of a better quality if they have a choice in the subject matter. (Appendixes include the diagnostic essay assignment and writing survey; 25 references are attached.) (Author/MG)

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Applying a Workshop Approach to Improve Writing in Low Achieving Secondary School Students

by

Susan Dickinson

Cluster 34

A Practicum I Report presented to the
Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

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PRACTICUM APPROVAL SHEET

This practicum took place as described.

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This practicum report was submitted by Susan Dickinson under the direction of the adviser listed below. It was submitted to the Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova University.

Approved:

Date of Final Approval of Report

Dr. William Anderson, Adviser

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ABSTRACT

Applying a Workshop Approach to Improve Writing in Low Achieving Secondary School Students. 1990: Practicum I Report, Nova University, Ed.D. Program in Early and Middle Childhood. Descriptors: Student-centered/ Self-paced/Motivation/Composition/Seminar/Workshop/ Process writing/Prewriting/Teaching writing/Teacher Role/Writing behavior/Modeling/Correcting/Revision/ Editing/ Group writing/Cooperative learning.

This practicum was designed to address the problem of low quantity and poor quality of writing in lower level English classes. The objectives were to increase motivation for writing, thereby improving overall writing production by the students.

A writing workshop was designed to improve the motivation of the students by "empowering" them to have a choice in what they write about and how they write it. Students were submerged and surrounded by writing for three class periods out of five in a school week. Individual conferences were used as a means of evaluation. Grading was done by charting each student's daily progress and having the student tell quickly where they were in their writing. The focus of the writing was on content, and student writing was kept in folders. Students chose their own topics and were allowed to work cooperatively.

The practicum outcomes were very good. Motivation was increased and, as a result, students' writing improved in both quantity and quality. Students' attitudes toward writing also improved, and the number of disruptions per class periods decreased. Students became involved in the writing process and developed skills enabling them to both work independently and share ideas with peers. The data from this practicum clearly showed when students become motivated their writing improves dramatically. Students will write more and of a better quality if they have a choice in the subject matter.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Description of Work Setting and Community

The specific community served by this senior high school was 80 percent suburban and 20 percent rural. Within the area were apartments, condominiums, townhouses, single family homes, estates, shopping centers, beaches, marinas, churches, and recreational facilities. In the feeder pattern for this high school were five elementary schools and two junior high schools. A shared-time vocational high school was located in the district.

Seventy percent of the community was upper middle class composed mostly of non-Hispanic whites. Blacks, Hispanics, French, Orientals, Iranians, and Jamaicans comprised the remaining 30 percent of the population.

According to the Ten Year Self-Study by the high school, a survey of the occupations of the parents of the senior class indicated that 49 percent were professionals; three percent were managers; seven percent were clerical workers; five percent were skilled workers; three percent were semi-skilled; two percent were unskilled; and 14 percent other. Regarding the educational level of parents; one percent had elementary school education only; three percent had partial but incomplete high school education; 12

percent had completed high school; eight percent had formal education beyond high school other than college; 18 percent had some college but no degree; 31 percent had a bachelor's degree; and 27 percent had advanced degrees.

The high school served the students of a stable, middle and upper class community. Only 50 students came from migrant and transient families, and less than three percent of the families in the community had incomes below the poverty level. In fact, 79 percent of the students who entered as tenth graders became seniors.

Of significance in planning programs was the fact that six and nine-tenths percent of the school population withdrew, a figure well below the withdrawal rate of 17.9 percent for this county.

The population of students totaled 2,313. The number of black students was 394. White students comprised 1,512 members and Hispanics were at 278. Asian students totaled 49 and Indian students five.

This school received the United States Department of Education recognition as a Blue Ribbon School of Excellence in 1989. It was also recognized statewide as a State Distinguished School. A record number of students, 469, took 785 Advanced Placement examinations (the largest in the Southeast). Students who took the

Scholastic Aptitude Test made an average score 23 points higher than the national average on the verbal portion and 35 points higher on the mathematics portion.

The Writer's Work Setting and Role

The English department offers a range of classes to meet the needs, abilities, and interests of the students. Five levels of English address these needs. Level A provides basic skills instruction; level B presents a regular program; level C focuses on college preparation; level D is the honors program; and level E, advanced placement, focuses on college level work. The writer's role included the teaching of four English classes. Two of these classes were twelfth grade college preparation classes (level C) and the two that were studied were eleventh grade regular (level B). The writer has taught similar courses in the same high school for 10 years.

The two B level classes chosen for the study were atypical for the school in terms of achievement. Like other English classes at this school, the total number of students was 25. The total count for the two classes was 50, of which well over 50 percent were minority and 26 percent were speakers of English as a second language. The gender make-up of the two classes was 36 male students and 14 female. This low level

eleventh grade English class was characterized by a lack of parental interest and a high failure rate. As many as nine students were failing at the half-year point. The students did not complete work assigned in class about 30 to 40 percent of the time and completed homework assignments only 20 percent of the time. Attendance was at 76.47 percent for these classes as compared to the school average of 95.14 percent. The school dropout rate was two percent while the dropout rate for these classes was about 16 percent. Parent contact concerning attendance had not improved the situation.

CHAPTER II

STUDY OF THE PROBLEM

Problem Description

Within the high school English department were five levels of classes. The two classes chosen for the study were titled "regular level" or "level B". These classes consisted of 50 students, and of this number, 23 students were Hispanic and Black. Twenty-six percent of the minorities spoke English as a second language. The regular level English class moved at a slower pace than that of the upper level English classes. Emphasis in these two classes was on basic English skills. The students kept writing folders and were required to place their compositions in the folders after they had been graded. The folders showed that, as a baseline measure, students produced an average of only 60 words per week when given two class hours per week to write on assigned topics. When students were allowed to select their own topics, the baseline measure was 90 words per week. The students were subject to a writing skills enhancement program which had been adopted by the county and required that they produce one essay, report, story, or other work product each week of class. The baseline measure for word production in upper level classes was 300 words per week. English teachers had a daily pupil load of

100 and these were spaced within four classes for the express purpose of placing special emphasis upon the improvement of writing skills. The students in the classes to be studied, however, were hostile to writing assignments that did not afford a sense of control in selecting one's own topic and therefore seemed meaningless to the students. As a result, the students had discipline problems during the designated writing periods. Traditionally, these students experienced a higher drop-out rate than that of the upper level classes with the figures at 16 percent and 6.9 percent respectively. Teachers at this high school preferred to teach the upper level classes because of the discipline problems and the lack of interest that occurred in the lower levels. Students in the lower level eleventh grade English classes wrote very little and in poor quality.

Problem Documentation

In brief, the problem was that students in lower level English classes wrote very little and in poor quality. The two lower level classes that were studied responded to a diagnostic essay (see Appendix A) that was measured with the Cramer Scales for Evaluating Writing. These essays showed 70 percent to be in the low category with only five percent in the high category. Using this same Cramer Scale (Cramer, 1982)

to evaluate final drafts produced by students and kept in their folders on a weekly basis showed a baseline sample score of 1.3 for mechanics and 2.1 for content (i.e., on a scale of 1 to 3 with 1 representing weak, underdeveloped writing and 3 representing strong, quality writing). The students produced an average of only 60 words per week when given two class hours to write on assigned topics. The response to the writing survey (see Appendix B) given to determine students' attitudes towards writing indicated that of 20 possible questions, on the average 16 were answered in a negative manner (80 percent). Also, discipline was a problem during designated writing periods with an average of three disturbances per five minute periods that were observed.

Causative Analysis

The major complaint we all had as students was not that the work was too hard but that it was boring. This complaint was--and still is--valid. By boring we usually meant that we could not connect what we are asked to do with its usefulness in our lives. William Glasser (1990) in his quote about motivation sums up what is wrong in most classes taught in high schools. Students fail to see how the material they are asked to learn has any relevance to their lives. As a result, they are not motivated to learn and quickly become

bored. They feel they have no "power" or say in the learning process. Traditional classroom methods give the power to the teacher and the student feels out-of-touch with what he is learning. Lower level English students lack motivation for writing because they have little control over the choice of topics. Don Graves' statement on the subject is that when we assign topics, we create a welfare system, putting our students on writers' welfare (1983). The traditional teaching of writing does not motivate students to write.

Students need the same options available to real-world authors, such as adequate time, motivation, and conferences with peers and teachers. Also, research shows that writers learn mechanics in context, not in separate grammar lessons. Grammar lessons simply do not transfer into composition unless they have contextual meaning.

Lower level students expect to fail. Over 40 percent of the students in the two lower level classes had repeated an English class since entering first grade. Fifteen percent had attended summer school while in high school for an English class. Students placed in these lower groups need high-interest, success-producing work to motivate them. What they generally receive for instruction is remedial work with low-level texts consisting of watered-down versions of

the classics. They also get teachers who must deal with a whole class of students who need discipline and management when the students actually need one-to-one help. The two lower level eleventh grade English classes exhibited a lack of motivation, and they had the expectation of failure. They were disruptive and easily distracted. Grades meant little to them as they were not motivated to achieve or in fear of failure. Their response to remedial work and traditional teaching of writing was negative and, at times, hostile. As a result, their writing production and acquisition of skills rarely increased.

Relationship of the Problem to Literature

William Glasser (1990) states that it is not difficulty that is the problem with students but rather that the work is boring. He believes that was a justified complaint in the past and it still is. "By boring we usually meant that we could not connect what we are asked to do with its usefulness in our lives" (p. 427). Glasser feels that when teachers assume the role of managers and facilitators, students respond in a favorable manner. This provides a non-coercive environment providing more input from the student. The more input the student has in his own education, the less likely he is to be bored. Boredom arises when the student feels powerless. Student empowerment creates a

classroom atmosphere that is quite different from the one traditionally found in academic courses. Drama, chorus and other classes in which the students work with other students, as well as the teacher, have been traditionally favored by students. Applying managerial techniques to the teacher and giving greater responsibility to the student is fundamental to the philosophy of Nanci Atwell (1987).

In her book, In the Middle: Writing, Reading, and Learning with Adolescents, Atwell states that the ability to read and write for pleasure and personal meaning comes with freedom to choose and the time to exercise that freedom. She feels students should choose their reading material, as well as their topics, for composition. The teacher acts as a facilitator, nudging and guiding the students as they work in areas that interest them. Teachers respond to the writing and reading chosen by the student, but do not control their choices. Adults model the behavior by writing and sharing the writing that they do with the students. Moffett (1983) concurs. He says, "Ideally a student would write because he was intent on saying something for real reasons of his own and because he wanted to get certain effects on a definite audience. He would write only authentic kinds of discourse such as exists outside of school" (p. 4). Writing in school is too

structured and too remote to interest the student. In the case of the lower level classes to be studied, this is especially true. Typically, motivation has been lacking. Glasser (1990) makes the case that a wide variety of subcultures within the United States do not value education as it is offered in most of our schools. The lower level classes in the target school were disproportionately high in minorities. The minority figure for the two lower level eleventh grade classes was over 50 percent in comparison with a 26 percent minority figure for the entire school population. The combination of a lack of support for education, coupled with no real say in what they learn, contributed to the poor motivation problem in the two English classes.

In 1967, Richard Larson proposed that the teacher should take care in composing the writing assignments given to students as the majority seemed to be stilted and overly concerned with annotating and evaluating themes in literature. He felt that composition should be sequential in that it should evolve and improve separately. Donald Murray (1968) viewed the good writing assignment as one that "is short, offering the writer a problem which is bothering him and is on a subject which is important to the writer" (p. 9). Murray believes motivation by self-interest is the

factor. Irmsher's (1979) opinion is that "choice [of topic] is certainly good [but] self-defeating" (p. 26). Most of the composition theorists and practitioners such as Donald Murray, Donald Graves, and Peter Elbow have encouraged us to turn the topic over to the students.

As we move to the 1980's, we find greater concern with the structuring of the assignment in terms of choosing the appropriate language, sentence structure, organization, information, and audience. Researchers felt that a totally unstructured assignment did not produce expected results (Graves, 1984; Murray, 1983; Pytlik, 1986). That is, students did not automatically take into account various aspects of writing that are necessary for clear communication. The teacher's job should entail structuring an assignment that gives freedom within certain boundaries. Roth (1982), in a study done by the Bay Area Writing Project, discusses the interpersonal and depersonalized aspect of the writing process. The process itself is complex, requiring an understanding of all the factors involved before an attempt to teach these factors can be made. In the middle 80's, Middleton and Reiff (1985) also show concern due to the fact that instructors often don't consider the tasks involved in asking students to give a written response. They argue that "every

instructor's writing assignments must reflect concern for the students' thinking and composing tasks in addition to reflecting the instructor's attention to teaching, course content and evaluating a student's learning."

Later, John Bishop (1989) and William Glasser (1990) agree that American youngsters are not working and learning to potential. Motivation again seems to be the problem. Everyone feels motivation is the root of the failure in education, but not everyone agrees on the solution. In terms of writing class, theorists argue for more structure and less structure. Traditionally, writing is teacher centered in terms of choosing and assigning compositions. Some researchers, Glasser, Bishop and Atwell among them, feel that assignments should be more student-centered within the boundaries of requirements and accountability.

Other findings show that students did better overall with textbook topics than with their own (Roth, 1982; Bishop, 1989). Despite admonitions from leading composition theorists, few assignments in high school and college specified audience, context, purpose, or style. The most common requirement in the assignment was mode. The poor essays that were narrow, trivial, and under developed led Betty Pytlik (1986) to conclude that "assigning and enforcing the modes as an ends

rather than a means may be robbing our students of profundity and flexibility in their writing" (p. 18). The root of poor writing may rest in motivational areas, assignments areas, or both. The literature since the early 1960's has grappled with the problem with varied results. Most theorists agree that students lack motivation because they can't interact with their learning environment. Also, expression in composition class requires greater involvement on the part of the students. Culturally, some students are less motivated than others. Many students downplay academic importance and scoff at achievers. Also, lower level students lack motivation because they have little control over their choice of topics. Don Graves' statement on the subject is that when we assign topics, we create a welfare system, putting our students on writers' welfare (1983). These concerns are all evident in the failure of the two lower level English classes to produce quality writing.

CHAPTER III

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS

The following goals and objectives were projected for this practicum.

Goals and Expectations

It is anticipated that student writing in two lower level eleventh grade English classes will improve in both quantity and quality. Motivation will increase thereby improving overall writing production by the students.

Behavioral Objectives

The students in the two lower level English classes to be studied presently keep all writing in folders which are stored in the classroom. At present, using the Cramer Scale for Evaluating Writing, only eight to 10 percent of this writing is scored in the middle and high categories on the scale. The writing will rise on this scale to 50 percent or more of their compositions that are rated in the middle or high category.

Presently, students are averaging 40 to 60 words total in response to an initial diagnostic time sample. The sample was completed during a class period of 55 minutes. There was no required rough draft, and it was suggested the first five minutes were to be used for

pre-writing, 30 minutes for writing, and the last five minutes for proofreading. Students will show an increase of 50 percent or more in number of words written in a time sample at the end of the implementation period (three months) over the 40-60 words written in the initial time sample.

During the writing periods, students in the two English classes are often disruptive. Behaviors such as loud talking, leaving their seats, inappropriate questions, etc. disturb the work atmosphere and often result in chaos. At the present time, there are noted three disturbances per five minute periods. After the implementation period, there will be a 50 percent reduction in these disturbances to three disturbances in a 10 minute time period.

Students were also given a writing survey designed to measure their attitudes toward writing. The written survey included 20 statements to which the students responded either true or false. The number of statements to which they responded favorably (indicating a positive response toward writing) were counted and indicated an overall attitude toward writing. The initial response to the 15 minute survey showed an average of 80 percent negative or void responses. Void responses consist of an inappropriate answer or a blank. The response to the writing survey

at the end of the implementation phase will show a 25 percent increase in positive attitudes to 40 percent favorable response.

Measurement of Objectives

In the writing done in class, students will show improvement in quality of writing by moving from the lower categories on the Cramer Scale for Evaluating Writing (Cramer, 1982) to the middle and high categories.

Also, the average number of words written within a class period will be counted and measured against the initial count of 40-60 words.

Disruptions in writing class of three per five minute periods will be compared with the number of disruptions at the end of the implementation phase. The drop in disruptions should indicate three per 10 minute periods.

Positive responses to the initial writing survey will be compared with positive responses at the end of the implementation period and will show an increase of 25 percent.

Mechanism for Recording Unexpected Events

A journal was kept on a weekly basis for recording progress throughout the implementation period. Any changes in student population, unexpected measurement

results, implementation problems, and the like were documented in the journal for future reference.

Description of Plans for Analyzing Results

The Cramer Scale for Evaluating Writing (Cramer, 1982) was chosen because it supplies a standard with which to measure compositions. It is a simple three category Scale which divides the writing into either low, middle, or high categories. The scale for evaluating composing skills in narrative writing looks at five categories consisting of: story structure, story setting, story characters, story conversation, and story idea. An example of a low rating under the category of story structure would be a narrative that showed no identifiable beginning, middle, or end. The story problem would be unclear. A rating in the middle would include a beginning, middle, and end present but not always identifiable. The story problem would be presented but not completely developed. To get a rating in the high category, a narrative would have to show an identifiable beginning, middle, and end. The characters and problem would be well developed showing appropriate conversational detail.

The scale for evaluating expository writing is divided into the categories of quality of ideas, quality of organization, selection of words, structure of sentences, and structure of paragraph. An example

of a low rating under quality of ideas would be an expository paper having most of its ideas vague, incoherent, inaccurate, underdeveloped, or incomplete. The details would often be unrelated to the topic. A middle rating for this same category would show an unevenness in completeness and development of ideas. Most of the ideas are related to the topic. To achieve a high rating, an expository paper would reflect ideas relevant to the topic that are fully developed, rich in thought and imagination, and clearly presented.

A similar scale deals with the mechanical skills for writing both the expository and narrative materials. This scale describes standards for grammar and usage, punctuation, capitalization, spelling, handwriting, and neatness.

The student writing was graded according to the standards set by the Cramer Scale for Evaluating Writing (Cramer, 1982). The analysis of data for improvement in quality centered on the amount of increase from lower to higher categories on the scale.

The evaluation instrument represented by the writing survey was developed because it allowed the students to respond simply and honestly as to their feelings toward writing. Some examples of the statements the students were asked to respond to are "Writing is for school but not for enjoyment" and "Time

spent on writing is time well spent." It was short in length (20 questions), and the student responded by simply checking "true" to indicate that they agreed with the statement or "false" to indicate disagreement. Positive responses were counted and improvement measured in the difference between the positive responses at the beginning of the implementation period and those at the end of the implementation period.

CHAPTER IV

SOLUTION STRATEGIES

Discussion and Evaluation of Possible Solutions

Students in lower level English classes write very little and in poor quality. John Bishop (1989) believes, as do many others, that lack of motivation is the underlying factor for students failure to produce adequate work. His solution to improve motivation and thereby improve writing is to use Cooperative Learning. This gives students greater input as it takes place in a group setting. Team work encourages a mutual goal rather than the teacher centered normal lecture method. Pauline Gough (1988) interviewed William Glasser and found similar thinking. Glasser also believes that the root of students failing to learn is lack of motivation. Dr. Glasser believes his "control theory" addresses the problem by "empowering" students to take control of their learning. What John Bishop called Cooperative Learning, Glasser labels a "learning team". Dr. Glasser contends that "learning teams" bring to the classroom the same type of approach that occurs in extra curricular activities. That is, the student can share information and ideas instead of being isolated and left to interpret by himself. Sharing is a basic human need, and schools don't make use of this concept when they tell students that looking on anothers work

is cheating. Students feel that they can contribute as part of a team, rather than bearing the brunt of learning individually. "Research on cooperative learning suggests overwhelmingly that when students work together in small groups their learning improves, their problem-solving skills are enhanced, social relationships improve, and they have a more positive attitude toward school" (Parker, 1985, p. 52). She believes that the closer the school can duplicate real life situations the better prepared the students will be after graduation. Cooperative learning encourages a willingness to pursue solutions to complex problems as a team member, which is important for life situations.

Gray (1989) also feels that traditional teaching is, for the most part, not working. His solution is to include seminars in the teaching experience. Seminars are best when contributions are made by all participants. They also require good texts rather than the traditional textbooks. Seminar learning is similar to cooperative learning in that it "empowers" the student to be responsible for his own education. The teacher does not direct the flow of information but rather facilitates, or manages it. Gray says that consecutive days as opposed to scattered days, produce much better results.

Wilbur Hatfield (1935) found that the teaching of a formal grammar separately from writing has no effect on writing ability. Despite this, grammar continues to be taught in the traditional way, that is, not directly related with the writing program. This does not help students to improve writing.

Heys (1962) found that just writing does not improve students' writing. Increasing the amount the student writes will not have a positive affect on the skills necessary to the composition process. Response was found in some research studies to produce superior results. Response can be in the form of traditional grading, (research differs in opinions on this) peer response, the seminar approach, etc. Intensive correction does no more good than moderate correction. (Dieterich, 1972) Overwhelmingly, researchers agree that reading and writing are closely connected. Writing teachers should encourage their students to read as this improves students writing (Heys, 1962).

Description and Justification for Solution Selected

At the very heart of the problem of poor writing in terms of quantity and quality in the eleventh grade program, is the lack of motivation. Students aren't grappling with the actual task of writing but do not see the writing as important to their lives (Moffett, 1983). They aren't "empowered" to have a choice in

what they write and the way that they write it. They become "blocked" because of fear of failure, or refuse to work at all for the same reason. For the lower level students, culturally they are not motivated to excel and the work itself is not self-motivating.

To correct this situation, students were coached using a workshop approach to writing as developed by Nanci Atwell (1987) to improve overall writing ability. Her workshop approach consists of "full-immersion" in writing. Students were submerged and surrounded by writing for three class periods out of five in a school week. The process is student-directed with the students deciding on the topic and type of writing they wish to produce.

The role of the teacher was that of facilitator. The teacher used individual conferences as a means of response, as well as the "status-of-the-class conference adopted from Don Graves (1984) as a way to quickly evaluate where each student stands each day. This was done by charting each students daily progress by asking the student to tell quickly what they were working on and where they were in their writing. The teacher graded only the finished product but acted as a helper and an editor, as do peers, up to the grading point. The focus of the writing was on content. Mechanical issues, such as grammar etc, come later,

after the writer has said what s/he wants it to (Atwell, 1987). Each student kept a copy of their writing in his or her folder. At the very foundation of a writing workshop is the idea that students will write if we let them. The teacher's job was to give the students ownership of the writing by letting them choose the topic and giving them the time to write. The teachers helped by conferencing and providing an atmosphere where the writers can work.

Specifically, the classroom was arranged so that students in different stages of writing could work undisturbed. When generating ideas, students could talk quietly in one corner, confer with the teacher in another, or write quietly in a section set specifically aside for quiet work.

Because the students could work cooperatively, they became self motivated. They could choose their own topics and share ideas freely. This improved the quantity of writing because now students had an interest in their writing. They had something to say. The quality improved as the students received instruction in mechanics in the context of their writing.

Grammar was no longer a separate set of skills that must be "transferred" to writing. As motivation improved with student "empowerment," attitudes toward

writing also improved. Students liked what they choose to do themselves. Because they were given time to complete their writing, they no longer felt at the mercy of a system in which they had no control.

Report of Action Taken

Students in the two lower level English classes had responded to a writing survey to record their attitudes previous to the implementation period. Student folders had been assessed for the number of words written by students per composition. The compositions were then graded according to the Cramer Scale for Evaluating Composition. Several class periods were chosen at random to count the number of disturbances that occurred during the writing periods. The average number of disturbances per five minute periods was then calculated. This information was kept as a reference point to be compared with later findings.

Preparation for the classroom followed the plan described by Atwell (1987) in her book, In the Middle: Writing, Reading, and Learning with Adolescents. This took place before the implementation of the program actually began. The classroom was divided into separate work sites and writing supplies and references were set in areas of easy access to the writers. The different work sites included places to confer, select

materials, work quietly, etc. The permanent writing folders were labeled with writers names and stored alphabetically in a file drawer until the end of the three month period. The daily writing folders were kept in accessible boxes. For record keeping, status-of-the-class chart (or grid) listing names of the students and a box for each day of the week next to each name was prepared. Twelve copies were run off, one for each week of the implementation period. This chart was a record of what writers are doing every class. The other record keeping device was a journal of the day-to-day happenings in the writing workshop. Conferences with students were included in this journal.

Month one and day one of the implementation period was used to introduce the workshop to the students. Students were made aware of what to expect and what was expected of them. A regular schedule of writing was established which will consisted of three days a week. In most cases this consisted of Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays. Students knew how their progress was to be monitored (status-of-the-class charts and the teacher's journal). The students then began to select their own topics. In addition to this the teacher explained the group share meeting that ends every class. This was a time for students to share thoughts

and writing with other students. The teacher acted as a manager guiding students to share with the class. Students were encouraged to peer edit. The teacher talked with the students in a way that modeled the behavior so that the students would be able to talk to each other in the same manner. The teacher let the students lead in conferences. The teacher listened to the students and kept the conferences short and to the point. As the students wrote, the teacher roamed the classroom conferencing with the students. The writing rules were as follows: No erasing, write on one side of the paper only, and save everything. These rules were posted in a high visibility area. This class period set the tone for the rest of the three month implementation period.

Week one of month one consisted of three writing class periods beginning with day one as described above and continuing to follow the structure of a brief status-of-the-class check at the beginning of the class. After the progress of the students had been noted the students began to work on their chosen topics and their writing began to represent different stages of writing. Some were working on a first draft, while others were planning or finishing a piece. Students worked from a daily folder and gave finished compositions to the teacher. The teacher managed,

edited, recorded, and conferred during the class period. Finished, graded compositions went into the permanent folders. For closure to the class period, the group share (five to ten minutes) was concluded with a sharing of ideas. On most days a couple of students shared writing. The teacher also shared writing at this time. The group share conducted itself as a purposeful dialogue.

Week two of month one followed the same format as set down in week one. Students began with the status-of-the-class progress report and continued to work on their separate assignments. The classes closed with the group share.

Weeks three and four of month one followed the same format as previous weeks.

Week one through four of month two also followed the format set down in the initial week with the exception of week two of month two when a progress report assessed the progress of the program.

Weeks one through four of month three continued to implement the writing workshop with the teacher recording the progress of the students in terms of words per week and evaluation on the Cramer Scale. The journal and status-of-the-class chart was recorded.

At the end of the three month implementation period, the student writing in the two lower level

eleventh grade English classes was again recorded as to the Cramer Scale for Evaluating Writing and number of words written per week. During the sixth and twelfth weeks, disturbances per five minute periods was recorded. The writing survey was again administered in the last week of class, and the number of positive responses was recorded. These were then evaluated for progress.

The implementation went smoothly, and student response was highly favorable. Comments made to the teacher by students centered on their enjoyment of the freedom they had been given. The teacher also received unsolicited comments from parents as to the enthusiasm the students were showing at home for their writing assignments.

There was some concern at the beginning of the implementation as to how the work was to be graded. Students were uneasy with receiving grades on a product that was still in progress. As the program evolved, however, these fears subsided, and they began to focus on the content of their work.

Another area of concern for the students was the freedom to choose a topic. They were, at first, uncomfortable with the lack of teacher input in the early stages. As some members of the class became excited with choosing their topics, the students began

to rely on themselves to choose and became excited about their own work. The success of those first few role models was infectious. The group share that occurred at the end of every class helped to ignite and spread the enthusiasm.

During the first six weeks of the implementation phase, two of the students were assigned to in-school detention for a period of two weeks. The detention monitor insisted the teacher send work for the students on a daily basis and was skeptical of the workshop approach to writing as the daily work assignment often was a continuation of the work that the student generated. The monitor was concerned with the lack of specific tasks to be given to the student on a daily basis. The teacher and the monitor agreed to let the students write for a class period and then have them check back with the teacher on a daily basis. This worked well considering the circumstances. However, the teacher and the students both felt that they missed the benefits of the sharing that was going on in class. The students told the class during the group share that in-school detention was boring, and they hated it. They much preferred to work with the class rather than be isolated in a detention situation.

As the students began the workshop, the noise level rose for the first week and a half. After the

students began to settle into the work and realized that they were responsible for generating their own topics, the noise level dropped below the normal classroom level. It remained below the normal classroom level for the remainder of the implementation. Students became respectful of others need for quiet time to write and became self monitoring. Prior to the workshop, interruptions were frequent and encouraged by members of the class. Once students realized they were accountable for their own progress, they discouraged peers from disruptive behaviors. Those not specifically on-task found alternative activities that did not disturb others.

To get permission for implementing the writing workshop, the English department head was consulted and familiarized with the program. He was enthusiastic about the program as it attempts to correct a problem that has been of concern to the English department for many years. The department head was an enthusiastic supporter of the program and provided supplies for the programs. The supplies are consistent with what are used in the traditional writing classroom. The department head conferred with the principal of the school, and permission was granted to implement the program.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS

In brief, the problem was that students in the two lower level English classes wrote very little and in poor quality. At the heart of the problem was a lack of motivation. As a means of motivating the students and correcting this situation, students were coached using a workshop approach to writing as developed by Nanci Atwell (1987) to improve overall writing ability. The workshop was student-directed with the students deciding on the topic and type of writing they wished to produce.

Using the Cramer Scale for Evaluating Writing (Cramer, 1982), eight to 10 percent of the initial writing samples scored in the middle and high categories on the scale. The objective was to raise scores on this scale to 50 percent or more of their compositions scoring in the middle or high category. The percentage of students scoring in the middle and high categories began to rise slowly, reflecting a two percent increase during the first two weeks. By mid point in the 12 week implementation, 20 percent of the students were scoring in the middle and high categories. The students either maintained the 20 percent status or rose slightly throughout the remainder of the implementation. The final week of the

program showed the students scoring in the 23 percent range for middle and high categories.

At the onset of the implementation period, students averaged 40 to 60 words total in response to an initial diagnostic time sample. The sample was completed during a class period of 55 minutes. Students were to show an increase of 50 percent or more in the number of words written in a time sample at the end of the implementation period (three months) over the 40-60 words written in the original time sample. The results of the second time sample scored 180 as the average number of words written.

During the writing periods, students in the two English classes were often disruptive. Behaviors such as loud talking, leaving their seats, inappropriate questions, etc. disturbed the work atmosphere and often resulted in chaos. Initially, there were noted three disturbances per five minute periods. It was predicted that after the implementation period, there would be a 50 percent reduction in these disturbances to three disturbances in a 10 minute time period. During the implementation, the number of disturbances rose to eight per five minute period for the first week and a half, but following this, they dropped to two disturbances per five minute periods by the mid point of six weeks. From the sixth to the twelfth week, the

disturbances ranged from a high of four to a low of two. The number of disturbances for the final week of the implementation was two per five minute period.

Finally, students were given a writing survey designed to measure their attitudes toward writing. The written survey included 20 statements to which the students responded either true or false. The number of statements to which they responded favorably (indicating a positive response toward writing) were counted and indicated an overall attitude toward writing. The initial response to the 15 minute survey showed an average of 80 percent negative or void responses. The response to the writing survey at the end of the implementation phase was to show a 25 percent increase in positive attitudes to 40 percent favorable response. The final survey indicated a 57 percent favorable response to the questions.

Discussion

Donald Murray observed, "Our students will write--if we let them" (1983). This statement embodies the main principle of a "process approach to writing." Researchers such as Donald Graves of the University of New Hampshire and Linda Flower and John Hayes of Carnegie-Mellon University and many others believe that writing is a process. Traditional instruction in writing has focused on the product which includes a

"perfect" final draft, correct spelling, punctuation, and grammar. Traditional instruction can thereby actually interfere with the process of writing by placing emphasis on the final graded paper. Writing is rather an ongoing process of generating ideas, creating drafts, and finally publishing them. This is how professional writers write. There should be a natural flow of ideas and language. A workshop, or process approach, to the teaching of writing fosters ways to encourage and stimulate pre-writing activities and motivate writers to constantly revise after they have created a first draft.

In applying this process/workshop approach to the problem of very little quantity and poor quality writing by students in two lower level English classes, it was predicted that both quantity and quality would improve. Using a workshop based on the experiences of Nanci Atwell in her book, In the Middle: Writing, Reading, and Learning with Adolescents (1987), students were empowered to direct their own writing activities. The results of the program were highly favorable and exceeded the predicted increases in all aspects.

On the Cramer Scale for Evaluating Writing (Cramer, 1982), the students were predicted to score a 50 percent increase in the rate of eight percent who scored in the middle and high categories of the scale.

This would bring them to 16 percent on the scale. The actual increase at the end of the 12 weeks showed them scoring at 23 percent in the middle and high categories. This reflected an additional seven percent increase. Students improved in quality of writing as they became motivated by their writing. They had a vested interest in what they were producing and took greater care in the quality of the presentation.

As they were allowed to choose their own topics, the length of the compositions also increased. They had more to say and more time to spend in developing what they had to say. The predicted increase was 50 percent over the 40-60 words they averaged at the start of the program. The final sample for words written in the timed diagnostic sample again went beyond the prediction, and the students showed an average of 180 words written, more than 60 words more than anticipated. Again, motivation was a crucial factor. Writing was no longer just an end product for a grade but rather a reflection of what they had to say.

In these lower level classes, disruption was often a factor. When measured in disturbances per five minute periods, the initial score was three. The prediction was that the program would produce a reduction by 50 percent. The final rate of disruption scored during the twelfth week showed two disruptions

per five minute period. This was slightly higher than the one and one-half score predicted. During the initial implementation of the program, the disruptions actually rose to eight per five minute period. The reason behind the rise in disruption was an uncertainty on the part of the students as to how to approach the assignment. The frustration the students felt and the ensuing behavior lessened as they became familiar with the workshop and what was expected of them. It should also be noted that the type of disruption changed. Previous to the workshop, the disruptions typically were attention getting and inappropriate to the context of the class. As the students became involved in their writing, the focus of the disruption tended to be less on attention getting and more on a response to their ideas or the ideas of another. Although it remained a disruption, the focus was clearly motivated by the writing process.

Lastly, the students were measured on a scale designed to measure attitudes toward writing. The initial response to the survey was 20 percent positive, and a prediction of 25 percent increase was given. The results went beyond the 30 percent goal, and the students scored a 57 percent favorable response to the questions. This significant increase reflected the increase in positive attitudes the students attained as

they began to experience successes in their writing. Nanci Atwell noted, "Learning is more likely to happen when students like what they are being asked to do. Learning is also more likely to happen when they can actively engage as learners. . ." (Atwell, 1987). The students were excited about writing because it was their writing. Writing and compositions became more than a finished product that was scrutinized for errors and then graded. Students began to view writing as a means of expressing themselves. The results of this change in attitude showed in the response they gave in the writing survey.

Another positive influence felt by the writing program was that attendance stabilized throughout the 12 weeks of the program and didn't take the usual dip that is experienced in the last few weeks of school. Traditionally, the lower level classes experience an increased absenteeism in the months of May and June. The two lower level classes taking part in the workshop did not reflect this trend. The absenteeism rate was consistent with that of earlier months.

Recommendations

1. Teachers should write and share their writings with their students. This helps to set the tone for sharing within the classroom setting.

2. Documentation is important. Keep track of what happens in conferences and in pieces of students writing.

3. Use resources when something isn't working. Ask why and consult with other teachers and students. Refer to the published articles and texts on the writing process.

4. Teachers should talk to students about writing in the same manner that they would talk to each other. Students can actually lead conferences. This again sets a tone for sharing and cooperation within the classroom.

5. Don't say or do too much. Too much teacher control negates the value of the workshop approach.

Dissemination

During the implementation of the program, interest was generated informally as I discussed process writing with my colleagues in the teachers lounge. English teachers were especially curious, and at the six week mark in the implementation, two had also begun using a workshop approach in their classrooms. I loaned my copy of In the Middle: Writing, Reading, and Learning with Adolescents, by Nanci Atwell, to other teachers, and as it circulates, it has generated much discussion on motivating students to write. My department head was very supportive of the writing workshop, and I am

presently making plans to describe the practicum at a department meeting in the fall.

During the implementation, I kept folders of the students' writing and anecdotes and have shared these with teachers in my department. During my yearly observation, I showed these writings to my assistant principal and explained the process writing approach. He was very enthusiastic and supportive.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Diagnostic Essay Assignment

Directions

You will have only this class period to complete this writing task, so budget your time accordingly. Do not take time to write a rough draft, but use the first five minutes for prewriting, about 30 minutes for writing, and the last five minutes for proofreading (checking your essay and correcting errors).

After reading the topic below, think about how you can respond to it. Use the pink response sheet labeled Prewriting on which to plan your essay, following the method you normally use, such as listing, outlining, clustering, etc. Then, on the remaining white response sheets labeled Essay, write an essay consisting of several paragraphs. Use as many response sheets as you need. Extras are available if you need more than those in your test packet. You are to write only on the front of the sheets; do not write on the back.

Composition

You have received a letter from a good friend who is having a traumatic experience because of something new in his or her life. Think back to a time in your life that was new and scary. Try to remember who was with you, what you did, and how you felt. Write back to your friend relating the incident in your life.

APPENDIX B

Writing Survey

Name_____

		Yes	No
1.	Writing is for school but not for enjoyment.	1._____	
2.	Time spent on writing is time well-spent.	2._____	
3.	There is no real purpose to writing.	3._____	
4.	Writing is a bore.	4._____	
5.	Writing is a good way to spend spare time.	5._____	
6.	Reading student writing in class is a waste of time.	6._____	
7.	Writing turns me on.	7._____	
8.	Writing is only for nerds.	8._____	
9.	I usually don't finish my writing assignments.	9._____	
10.	Writing is rewarding to me.	10._____	
11.	Writing becomes boring about 30 minutes.	11._____	
12.	Most writing is too long and dull.	12._____	
13.	Writing about any topic is not really learning.	13._____	
14.	There should be more time for writing during the school day.	14._____	
15.	Writing is something I can do without.	15._____	
16.	I write during summer vacation.	16._____	

17.	I show my writing to others.	17._____
18.	Writing is dull.	18._____
19.	My writing grades are generally good.	19._____
20.	I often write letters to my friends.	20._____